

Sinclair Broadcasting's decision to force their stations to air the anti-Kerry documentary "Stolen Honor" less than a month before the election is a clear example of the dangers of media consolidation. This is the same company that not long ago ordered its stations not to air the episode of Nightline in which the names of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq were listed. Sinclair Broadcasting is clearly in the hip pocket of the Bush administration and campaign.

Sinclair-owned stations reach 24 percent of U.S. households. For Sinclair to order local stations using public airwaves to air such a clearly partisan documentary for the obvious purpose of smearing a presidential candidate is beyond unethical. It is an abuse of the company's position as the operator of public television networks (by public I mean that they use public airwaves free of charge, and that anyone can pick them up with an antenna--it's not something people can choose and pay for like a cable network), a position which gives Sinclair power as a major purveyor of information to the public. In short, it is an unscrupulous abuse of power.

This must not be allowed.

Sinclair uses the public airwaves free of charge, and is obligated by law to serve the public interest. But when large companies control the airwaves, we get more of what's good for the bottom line and less of what we need for our democracy. Instead of something produced at "News Central" far away, it's more important that we see real people from our own communities and more substantive news about issues that matter.

Sinclair's actions show why we need to strengthen media ownership rules, not weaken them. They show why the license renewal process needs to involve more than a returned postcard. Thank you.